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ABSTRACT

Most reasons for the failure of youth groups can be organized around a few major themes or points. The most commonly mentioned reason is "the leader leaves." Four possible outcomes in this case are continuation of the group under a new leader, changes for the worse under a new leader, floundering, and death of the group. A second reason for group failure is lack of commitment. Strategies for control of commitment include family traditions, parental involvement, continuity in summer programs and camps, "tight" programming, "structure," and getting the children to work at something. The "formula for success" idea can also be employed to explain some of the cases of groups that are in decline. A necessary component changes; this leads to other changes; and it all begins to come apart. In cases of groups that are transformed, a key component (such as the leader) changes; this leads to other changes; and the group becomes a different group with a rearranged "formula for success." A final reason for failure involves a crisis of support. Both money and adult volunteers are needed, but the competition for them has grown as the number of youth groups has multiplied. (YLB)

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EXPLANATIONS FOR FAILURES OF YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS.

American Educational Research Association

Annual Meetings, Montreal, April 1983.

For the past six years I have been gathering case studies of youth programs in several localities in eastern Canada and the United States:[1] schools' extracurricular programs; such groups as the Scouts and Y, Junior Achievement, 4-H, Boys' and Girls' Clubs, Vocational Students' Organizations, Civil Air Patrol; such Canadian groups as Sea Cadets and Air Cadets, Allied Youth, Young Christian Students, Inter-School Christian Fellowship, and the Duke of Edinburgh program; youth programs by the churches; hobby groups; as well as volunteer work by teenagers; sports teams; bands and orchestras; summer camps; travel programs; and offerings by cities' recreation departments.[2] Large, adult-controlled organizations stand behind most of these. Thus the Y, Scouts, 4-H, and other such national and even international organizations have their local branches. Schools, churches, and recreation departments put on their own programs; but these too are tied loosely to larger systems. Thus each school is part of a city or county school system; and a school's clubs--Key Club, Hi-Y, Junior Red Cross, and so on--are local branches of national organizations. A minority of youth groups are more or less autonomous--not tied into these national organizations and local institutions. These include some groups which are actually run by the youth themselves.

As a result of check-backs involved in the six-year study, as well as retro-

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spective accounts by informants, I have become aware of the instability of these groups. The large institutions--churches and schools and YMCAs--live on. But the persons who run the programs are in considerable turnover. Programs change, are discontinued; new programs start up; the names of programs change--with the comings and goings of youth-workers. Autonomous local groups, which are not tied into larger organizations, tend to be short-lived. Even branches of the larger organizations--local IODE chapters, Cub packs, and so on--frequently die. And local institutions--YMCAs, churches, and so on--discontinue programs.[3]

Youth groups, then, may "fail" in the sense of going out of existence. And they can "fail" in the sense of going into decline, perhaps losing membership, becoming relatively inactive. Even the larger organizations are subject to ups and downs.

Why do youth groups fail? After having listened to post-mortems of defunct groups; and having watched and heard about groups in decline; I k now possess a large collection of after-the-fact explanations. Most of these can be organized around a few major themes or points:

1. An inspirational leader, or a core of working members, or someone who was responsible for the program or who made it work--mx moved on. So the group died, or went into decline, or changed. For independent groups which are started by the youth themselves: the problem is to attach themselves to an institution, or to turn their group into an institution, before the organizers of the group move on.

2. The larger organizations (as well as local groups) owe their existence to "support"--in the form of work by adult volunteers; and funds from government grants perhaps, or from the United Fund, or perhaps from private contributions. As youth groups have multiplied, many more organizations have come to share in the support of, say, the United Fund. And with the recent economic hard times, many voluntary organizations (not just youth organizations) are experiencing a crisis of support. In this competitive situation, public relations and getting grants becomes more important for the survival of organizations. But getting

support depends, too, on the popularity of the group's youth programs--on how much real enthusiasm it can generate.

3. Many of the explanations for successes, as well as failures of youth groups, summer playgrounds, recreation centers, camps, and so on--refer back to "programming." This is a subject-area in its own right, taught in Recreation courses and textbooks, having to do with program-planning, preparation of staff, determining clientele needs, setting goals...down to what to do on a rainy day. Two sub-themes in this group of explanations should be mentioned:

4. Commitment of staff can be a problem; especially so in short-lived summer programs. And getting some necessary minimum of commitment from the kids themselves can be problematic in drop-in centers, recreation centers, and other arenas where youth workers are expected to serve a youthful public.

5. A final theme xx in the explanations has to do with rebellious and cynical attitudes which can undermine a youth group. "Boyscout" is, after all, a term of derision. Scouts, and other groups, are sneered at by some teenagers. They are for goody-goodies, for squares. A child's career in a group such as Scouts can finally come to an end, because new social influences make him ashamed to "take it seriously." Youth-group leaders must contend with this. Some groups get out of control, as these sorts of attitudes become dominant. In other cases a "strong" leader or program holds these tendencies in check; the youth continue to "take it seriously."

Summarizing the explanations in this thematic fashion--in terms of commitment, the leader's departure, trouble getting support, and so on--tends to oversimplify the actual accounts, and cut them short. (And of course who knows how oversimplified, and otherwise distorted, these explanations are, as representations of what actually happened in these cases?) Some of the explanations are before-after stories of once-successful groups, now in decline. Others are successful-vs.-unsuccessful xxxxxxx comparisons of two contrasting leaders. (For example, good-coach/bad-coach comparisons.) These lead us into explanations for xxx

success too, and general principles underlying success.

To give three quick examples of success-principles: Working together toward a common goal seems to be important for a group's morale. Money-raising drives will serve this function: either for charitable causes, or working to raise money so that the group can go on a trip (which in itself should be a group-strengthener), or do something else. A child who is selling calendars, collecting bottles, or wanting his mother to bake for bake sales, can be a pest--but all this is good for the group. Similarly, parental involvement, adult involvement, strengthens the group--attending meetings, helping out, showing interest. (This seems a much less important aid to group-success than does the first--that the children be working toward a common goal. Parents may be relieved to know this.) A third success-theme is program-enrichment. Trips, outings, and other events of special interest; leadership-training (for the youth themselves) and other features of educative value; are more trouble to arrange than are routinized recreation and ritualized meetings. They require planning, preparation, a lot of work on the part of the adults. Enriched, interesting programs are possible with strong groups; but this tends to erode quickly when the group begins to slip.

At any rate, program-enrichment, parent-participation, and working together toward a common goal, are some of the success-themes around which the paper could have been organized. Instead I have chosen to organize it around failure-themes. But these various reasons for group-success will necessarily appear too, in the discussion to follow.

<u>The Leader Leaves.</u>

This is the most commonly-mentioned reason, in explanations for the decline of youth groups. Usually it is the adult leader who leaves: a volunteer worker (such as Scoutmaster), or staff person, coach, or teacher-advisor. Sometimes it is several leaders, or several of the persons who did much of the work and kept the group going; this would include teenage group members ~~and~~ or officers, in addition

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to the adult(s).

Since an organization's teenage officers usually change year-by-year, and adult leaders frequently change too, a youth group typically alters its character as time goes by. On revisits, it seems different. Its personality changes, its activities and focus of interest may shift, with this changing of the guard. Revisits of especially fine groups can be a letdown. The group may still be perfectly viable, even flourishing; but, one feels, it is not what it used to be. (This holds for voluntary organizations for adults, as well.)

In cases of the leader leaves, there are about four possible outcomes.

1. The new leader (or leaders) is adequate, and the group continues. One might not like it as much, but it seems healthy enough.

2. The new leader is worse than the old one in specified ways, and the group changes for the worst. Stories that students tell me, of the decline of teams, school orchestras and bands, Brownie troops (etc.), often fall into this category. A good coach is replaced by a bad coach. Spirit deteriorates; perhaps several players leave; the winning combination is lost; or whatever. And the teller of the story says something about deficiencies, in the new coach or leader, which produced changes for the worse. Ordinarily I never learn the long-term outcome. Does the group finally die; is the team finally discontinued? Does a new leader finally come along, so that the group revives? Or does it continue to flounder along in this unsatisfactory fashion. I never find out.

3. Floundering, after the departure of a good leader, I shall put as a third category of outcomes. High school bands and orchestras and teams will no doubt keep going. But with other sorts of youth groups, the leader's departure brings on a crisis of survival. The group struggles to keep alive; tries to hold onto its members and replace the leader. Frequently, I think, it goes into decline. This may end in the death of the group; or, finally,

in rebirth, with adequate leadership. (Again: I seldom learn the long-term outcome. But this must depend, in part, on which organization is behind the group. A YMCA with a building-based program will probably keep trying, replacing any departed leader with a new one. A church may stop trying, at least for awhile.)

Floundering groups, in a transition crisis after the leader's departure, show various of these characteristics:

An unwilling volunteer takes on the leadership. He (or she) does this as a personal sacrifice, because a truly willing volunteer cannot be found. Often, I think, these people are inexperienced or lacking in background; or they do not have the special talent and flair for youth-work that is required. Neither do they have enough help from other adult volunteers. (If there were not a shortage of willing and qualified workers, a sacrificial victim like this would not have to step forward.) I have attended two pathetic groups' meetings--and heard of others--which evidently fell into this category. The leader did not know what to do and could not control the group. She (he) also had inadequate help. With other cases of uninspired leaders--quite possibly some of them took their jobs because no one else wanted to; it was impossible to say. (The other logical possibility is a willing but inept leader, under whom the group suffers; this occurs too, of course.)

If the leader is unenthusiastic, and/or has insufficient help, the program of activities becomes less interesting. Outings, and other events which are a lot of trouble to prepare, are less frequent. The children stay inside their meeting-hall, do the more routinized activities. The group has less "purpose," less excitement. There is a decline in enthusiasm on the part of leader and members alike.

In floundering groups, there is often (I think) rapid turnover of leaders. Several people come and go in a fairly short time. Co-leaders may be tried. As a result, the group's overall purposes, the program-plan, as well as routine arrangements, tend to vacillate and become uncertain.

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Members grow discouraged. They start dropping out. Efforts are made, to persuade them to stay. The more committed members and youth-officers, who have invested the most time and work in the group, are in conflict. They may help in the effort to pressure people to stay. But as co-workers drop out, the burden on them becomes greater. As things go badly, their incentive becomes less.

The group, in its flounderings, tries to recruit new members to replace the ones who leave. These attempts may further weaken it; although this does not have to be the case. Perhaps demands and requirements are relaxed; emphasis shifts to fun and games. (See below: Strong groups tend to be demanding. They can afford to be; and by so doing, they get commitment. Absence of demands is both a symptom and a cause of weakness.) Or: some kind of distortion may be introduced, in efforts to get more members. In three of the reported cases: a floundering group admitted much younger children in its attempts to replenish membership. It then (according to the reports) pitched its program to the younger members, thus boring the older youth. In another case, an Anglican young people's program, desperate for members, expanded to include three other parishes. The group met, in turn, at each of the four parish halls. By so doing, the group lost its home base; there were mixups about meeting-dates and halls, problems with rides to meetings; and the ensuing confusion edged it further into decline.

So much for <u>floundering</u>.

4. The fourth possible outcome of <u>the leader leaves</u> is: <u>the group dies</u>. Or, in the case of an institution which has a number of staff and volunteer workers, and several programs: one of the programs is discontinued. A YMCA gives up on its Junior Leader Corps. A church stops trying with a late 'teens group. A school discontinues its drama club, because the teacher-advisor has left.

I have collected descriptions of independent groups, which have no larger organization (church or school or Y or whatever) standing behind them. Most of

these were youth-initiated groups, started and run by the teenagers themselves. As mentioned earlier: with these cases, when the leader (or leaders, or people who started the group) leaves, the group usually dies. Most exceptions are youth-run groups which are sub-parts of larger adult-run organizations. (A canoe club's Junior Boosters. High school clubs without teacher-advisors. A church young people's group without an adult leader.) For longevity, a group needs a parent-institution. Then, when the leader leaves, or the group is otherwise in trouble, the parent-organization can replace the leader (or whatever) and maintain the group. The parent institution also (usually) supplies a building to meet in, financial support, guidance and help from adults (a board of directors, staff and volunteer leaders), perhaps a national-program formula to borrow from (as with groups such as 4-H, Junior Achievement, Scouts and Y). Independent groups start out in a flush of enthusiasm; but sooner or later a break in continuity will come, someone will leave, and then they are in a very vulnerable position, without the backing of a parent organization.

This is not to say that the larger organizations do not have their problems also. And sometimes they do give up on a local group or program, and let it lapse. Also, a few independent and youth-initiated groups are exceptions; they live on. Two boys' volleyball clubs have been described to me, which grew and apparently turned themselves into "institutions"--sponsoring teams and clinics and sub-programs--thereby becoming parts of the sports-administration systems in their provinces(Newfoundland and Nova Scotia). Also, it is my impression that some deviant groups--motorcycle gangs, street gangs--have lasted for a fairly long time, and should be counted as exceptions.

At any rate: if no parent organization stands behind a group--if it is an "independent"--then it usually lasts as long as the people who started it remain with the group. Even if there is a parent organization: sometimes the group dies anyway, because the organization stops trying. Also, the institutional support that groups get may leave much to be desired; sometimes a group flounders along,

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then perhaps stops entirely, because of inadequate support. One example is the Anglican young people's group which was mentioned before. The youth started it themselves, then went in search of a leader. The church, evidently, was not really equipped to take on this project. There was a succession of temporary leaders and co-leaders. Satisfactory leadership was never provided; nor a regular meeting-place; nor a coherent program-plan; nor funding. The group floundered and finally expired.

To summarize: when the leader leaves the group may die because there is no institution standing behind it; or because institutional support is inadequate; or because the parent institution decides to stop trying for awhile.

Finally: some groups seem to owe their lives to inspirational leaders. When the leader leaves he (or she) cannot be replaced. Efforts to continue the group fail. The leader's personality was an essential ingredient, it appears, for the group's success.

Why Does the Leader Leave?

Even these inspirational leaders do tend to move on. In my check-backs, I was shocked to find that so few of them were still with their groups. Similarly, in stories students tell of their greatest youth-group experiences; which (they think) had the most impact on their lives: often, one finds, the group is gone now, or changed, the leader departed. The most "successful" youth groups, in terms of arousing enthusxiasm and having impact, are often "failures" in terms of longevity.

As to why leaders leave: they eventually become exhausted, I think, or disappointed and let-down; for some combination of reasons, the enthusiasm which buoyed them up and kept them going, declines; or their enthusiasm shifts to a new project. After all they are volunteers, working for no pay at all; or very low-paid junior staff. They have little career-stake in staying put and continuing where they are. So they move on.

(The organizations do have some staff who make decent salaries; but these

persons seldom are the ones who actually work with the youth. The group leaders tend to be volunteers, as with Scouts and Junior Achievement; or very low-paid junior staff, as in the YMCA; or some combination of these, as with the churches' youth g work; or fully-salaried staff who do this as extra work, as in the schools' extracurricular programs. Although these persons are under-rewarded and perhaps under-appreciated, this arrangement does assure that the people who work with youth groups are assuredly not doing it for the money. And they have more freedom to quit, when the time has come to quit.)

Sometimes, too, they leave for financial or career-reasons. A YMCA youth program director finally decides he has to make a decent salary to support a family; so he becomes a truck-dispatcher. An assistant pastor builds a youth program; then he finally gets his own church and moves on.

As for the exhausting nature of the work: this varies, according to the personal style of the leader; the type of organization; and how much help the leader gets. But, visiting meetings, I have often marvelled that a volunteer would subject himself to that much stress. The leaders, typically, are energetic young persons who, after a normal day's work, can plunge themselves into the hullaballoo of, say, a Sea Cadets' meeting. But even they, after awhile, get enough.

As to their disappointments and let-downs: one can only guess about this. These are fairly democratic organizations, with a lot of group-decisions and openly-aired disagreements; possibly this means open factional conflicts and hard feelings eventually. Financial cutbacks of the past few years have meant program cutbacks. Personal disappointments of ex-leaders perhaps derive from these sources.

Youth-work is a field of new beginnings, new departures. The exciting groups often have the sense of newness, freshness. The youth are enthusiastic, fired up; they feel they have found something. These little brushfires of enthusiasm: perhaps they die down in a few years. I like to imagine that the departed leaders, moving on, have after awhile started new little brushfires elsewhere.

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Commitment.

This is a general principle which can be invoked to partially explain numerous "successes" as well as "failures." It can be applied to a wide range of situations, different kinds of youth groups and programs (as well as to other situations unrelated to the youth-work field.) Paul Gump's "claimed" concept has to do with commitment. (If a teenager can be gotten to work and sacrifice for his school, or for some group, then he comes to feel that they need his help. He feels obligated to give further support. The group has claimed him.)[4] Of Kleinfeld's two Boy Scout troops, described for this symposium: the "downtown" troop, which seems to be the stronger group, involves the boys in money-raising drives; and parents stand on the sidelines during Scout meetings, make comments, "talk Scouting," and cheer the boys on. The weaker group does not have these features. The difference between the two troops can be explained, partially, by the commitment principle. The "downtown" boys work together to raise money for the troop; and parents are involved as spectators and commentators (which, I would argue, indirectly commits the boys). As a third example, outside the youth-work field, Howard Becker uses the commitment concept in his writings about career-choice. University students choose their fields of study, select courses to take, supposedly with a career objective in the background. Certain fields are more specialized than others. If you transfer out, fewer credits can be used in another course of study. Similarly, the degree of sacrifice varies--of money, time, work. More quickly in specialized fields: over time the student becomes committed. His degree of commitment is equal to how much he would lose (in credits, time; money and work wasted) if he changed his mind, quit, transferred to another field.[5]

In youth programs, commitment generally comes from working; by so doing, you have a stake in the group, or in whatever you were working on; therefore

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you "take it seriously." This general statement falls short of covering all situations--as with the case of family-commitment (above), or commitment in the form of group-belonging (if you quit you desert your friends, give up your position in the group). Also, the "work" can take innumerable forms. In some instances it is work for the sake of the group: serving on a committee, helping to raise money, etc. But taking sailing lessons, being on a basketball team, can also invest a youth in a group activity so that he comes to "take it seriously."

When a group or program fails to create the conditions for commitment, then youth are insuffficiently motivated, make light of the program; maybe challenge the leader's control and create discipline problems; perhaps are irresponsible, don't show up, finally quit. They "don't take it seriously." Therefore, anything that can be done to "hook" the group members--a hundred-dollar membership fee, or a two-month probationary period, a period of trying out for the team, anything to arouse members' ambitions, or to ego-involve them in some form of work or learning (as in an English riding club, tennis camp, judo lessons)--can be used to get the necessary motivation.

However some situations offer little leverage. Drop-in centers and play-ground programs are in an especially [illegible] position. Summer programs and camps can have commitment problems. Some high school committees are weak, with respect to possibilities for commitment. Therefore: youth workers in certain situations are at an initial disadvantage in trying to get commitment. They can transcend their disadvantage and have "successes." But they have less to work with than does, say, the coach of a high school basketball team.

In the next few pages I will say a bit more about drop-in centers, summer recreation programs, camps, and high school committees; then, failed attempts to involve children in work-projects; and finally, a youth groups which is especially strong with respect to commitment.

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In drop-in centers and summer playgrounds--where children come and go, wander in to see if there is anything going on which might be fun--staff are in an especially weak position. Discipline problems are common, I think, especially with older teenagers; at evening events especially, such as dances, hordes of youth may swamp the center and staff lose control. If the center has been put in a neighborhood to lure the youth off the streets and combat delinquency, the youth may bring their delinquency (whatever form it takes) into the center with them.

Recreation workers try to provide "structure to this situation by means of "good programming"--scheduled activities, which change frequently enough to sustain children's interest, and minimize periods of free time during which things might be out of control. Certain of these will be groups and classes which meet regularly and--when successful--involve children in continuing, ego-involving activities, such as a baseball league, swimming and diving lessons, crafts classes and the like. With these, there is some possibility of commitment. A few more of the older youth may become committed by serving on a youth-committee which helps plan and supervise activities.

It is a teetering balance, between successful programming on the one hand, and breakdown (due to failed programming and projects which do not engage the children's interest) on the other. Although continuous youth groups with stable membership, such as Scout troops, are in a stronger ~~position~~ position than are summer playground programs and drop-in centers, the principle applies to them as well. I have attended a Girl Scout meeting and a Webelo meeting, and heard of other cases, in which the leader lost control. The children "did not take it seriously." There seemed to be a number of reasons for this. But one was that the little craft projects or whatever, which the leader wanted the children to work on, simply were inadequate to sustain their interest. Boy Scouts' formula for success requires boys to be working individually for badges, and also working collectively to prepare group events. A Scout meeting will intersperse periods

of business--instructions and help given to the boys--with periods of play. During a meeting, "If one kid is at loose ends," as a parent-helper said--that is probably the normal state of affairs. "But if several of them are at loose ends...." --then the meeting has begun to slide out of control. In other words, the "structure" includes "keeping the boys working toward goals" --both individual goals and collective. Gaining the children's commitment, in this manner, helps the adult leaders keep order. But of course it is not solely in the interests of control. Whatever educative value a youth program might have, one would suppose, requires that the children progress past the point of "fooling around" and merely using it for casual fun, to something more purposive.

In summer programs, commitment of staff is problematic also. I heard descriptions of teenage playground workers who shirked, were disloyal, and in times of crisis when the adults' authority was challenged by other teenagers, in effect joined the enemy. This can also occur in summer camps which are without means to socialize new counsellors, during a period of pre-camp or "leadership training." The problem is lack of continuity. If the camp or summer program suddenly begins in June, how can new staff feel they have a stake in it? In a continuous, school-year-long program, new leaders can be groomed and can form their loyalties. But if a leader comes into a program "cold," at the first of the summer; may be she (or he) will be a faithful and devoted worker for the program, simply because she is a conscientious person. Perhaps not. Loyalty cannot be helped along, by a period of prior commitment. (In a continuous, x long-term program it is also easier to screen out misfits and, over time, "shake down" the staff.)

Y camps, church camps, Scout camps, and certain other camps are built around a nucleus of permanent staff people who have worked together before--either during past summers or in the organization's year-long programs. In such cases, some of the organizational problems have been ironed out before the summer starts, and there is a certain amount of commitment to begin with. A camp tradition is carried along, from year to year; it becomes the model for new counsellors and new campers. (This is a special case of a more general

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principle. If a good tradition can become established in a group, then older members can pass it along to newer ones. Especially successful youth groups have the benefit of such traditions: older youth-officers set a good example for newly-elected ones; new group members are formed to the traditions by older members.)

Certain people told how they went to some particular camp summer after summer, eventually becoming a CIT and then a counsellor; how their siblings had done this too; and possibly an uncle or even a parent. In Nova Scotia, Camp Kadimah brings together the children of the Jewish community; and parents and older relatives, who may have been campers at Kadimah in their day, continue to be interested and involved. This family commitment would seem to reinforce a child's motivation at Kadimah.

Kadimah benefits from family traditions of involvement, which reinforce campers' own sense of involvement. To give two more quick examples of this: Kleinfeld's Scout meeting, in which parents kibbitzed from the sidelines, would be one. In Church Lads' Brigade, in Newfoundland, it can span three generations: child, father, and grandfather.

So much for family traditions, parental involvement, problems of continuity in summer programs and camps; and "tight" programming (with a minimum of "slack" between scheduled activities), "structure," and getting the children to work at something--as strategies of control.

Now I want to turn to another application of the commitment concept. This has to do with high school committees--yearbook staff, Student Council committees, winter carnival preparations' committees, committees that make arrangements for graduation festivities, or for a dance or special program. People who were active in extracurricular activities, held offices, took leadership roles, and helped with arrangements for various school events, say that one of the lessons they learned was that their fellow workers were often

irresponsible. After having been let down various times, they came to learn whom they could count on (to do what they promised to do) and whom they could not rely on. Although individual differences between students must account for some of this--some youth being"lazy," irresponsible, while others are reliable and conscientious workers--differing conditions for commitment might also enter in.

Certain committees are thrown together for one year only. In these I would expect commitment to be weakest and irresponsibility most common. By contrast: if a student works for one committee, club, or other group for several years, he should have more chance to become committed. An example is a yearbook staff in which the student might take a lowly position when he is a sophomore; be rewarded for faithful work with an assistant editorship when he becomes a junior; and perhaps cap off his career by being editor as a senior. An understudy system, such as this, is stronger in three respects. Holders of the important positions have to prove themselves first. Not only are they screened; they also have had prior experience. Some members of the group know what has to be done, since they were also committee-members the previous year. (On one-year committees, it is up to a teacher-advisor to tell the group what has to be done.) Finally: working on the staff for several years; forming the ambition to be promoted to editor (or whatever) and then realizing that ambition; the leaders of the committee have more chance to become committed (for example, to produce an exemplary yearbook, better than last year's; also commitment in the sense of not wanting to let fellow workers down). The commitment-conditions might not be terribly strong; but at least a group with understudying seems in a stronger position than does a one-year committee.

I want to finish this, now, with two examples of spectacularly strong commitment-conditions. The first is a travel club in a Cape Breton high school. The club-advisor was a French teacher; and a very persuasive--as well as demanding

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--teacher he must have been. A student had to be in the club for three years before he got to take the trip. The teacher demanded that all club members study French during that time; and his French classes were interspersed with illustrations from previous trips by past travel clubs. At club meetings he showed pictures from the earlier trips. Over the three years (while my informant was in the club)the group raised fifty-five thousand dollars from the dollar-a-week dues and from innumerable money-raising projects --car-washes, casserole suppers, Easter Seal deliveries, registering voters for elections, door-to-door selling, and tea 'n sales. Parents also had to help; and parents had to attend montly meetings. Reportedly, about five students dropped out. Forty members persevered through the three years and, with their personal investment in the trip, took the two-week tour to Paris, Rome and Zurich. (It was "wonderful." With so much invested, how could one admit that it was otherwise?)

The last example is Young Christian Leadership, a Catholic service club in Newfoundland. YCL does money-raising drives (walkathons, bottle drives, Christmas food drive, etc.) for various causes; and this particular chapter had a choir that sang at nursing homes and in churches. The work was described as enjoyable, because of the group's spirit. ("The feeling of everyone pulling together.") This seems to be a common ingredient of successful service groups: work that is fun, because of the spirit in which it is done. In addition, service clubs put on social events also--they are really a blend of service and social--and this is an added reward for membership.

Although YCL had plenty of applicants for membership, it weeded out unserious ones during a two months' probationary period. Only candidates who proved they were willing to work were admitted. And everyone did work--club officers and choir members most of all--but there were no nonworking members. Also, everyone had a say in decisions, which were made at club meetings.

Young Christian Leadership exemplifies a service club's formula for getting spirit and commitment. Its special features are the probationary

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period; the fact that all members had to work (some groups have a core of working members and other peripheraal members); and perhaps the advantage, for getting commitment, of being a church group.

YCL also well-exemplifies how a group can "claim" its members (in Gump's sense). They have to work; they go through two months' probation to get in; and they are said to have a say in decisions. All this should give members a stake in the group's success.

This concludes the discussion of commitment. As mentioned before: successful groups tend to be demanding--of time, work, perhaps money, sometimes of parents' participation. Demandingness is both a cause and a result of groups' success, I think. Weak groups cannot afford to ask for much, for fear of scaring away members; either they are relatively inactive (and undemanding), or they would like to lure in new members with fun and games. Strong groups can afford to ask for sacrifices; and the sacrifices (if not mismanaged) build commitment.

If one happened, for example, to be shopping for a Scout troop: demandingness might be taken as one sign of a "good" troop. Enlisting the boys in money-raising drives--which distinguished Kleinfeld's strong troop from her weak troop --is a clue to a strong group which is building commitment.

Formulae for Success.

National organizations such as Scouts provide models for local groups, laid out in handbooks, manuals and brochures, and taught in leader-workshops. These gives guidance for programming, and for the organization of the local group. Some organizations give more detailed advice than do others. Scouts, Guides, Brownies, Cubs, 4-H, Junior Achievement; junior auxiliaries of military units such as Civil Air Patrol and Sea Cadets; the Vocational Student Organizations; Boys' and Girls' Clubs; Y'CA with its Hi-Y, Leaders and Junior Leader programs --these are examples of larger organizations which provide detailed models for local groups.

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However the national format is not imposed on local leaders. It is simply suggested. These systems are more permissive and loose than, say, a business organization or government department with its local offices. The Boy Scout organization, for example, would deny that it had any authority over individual Scout troops. The parent organizations see themselves as offering backup which local groups can draw on. Since this is the case, there is leeway for new ideas on the part of local leaders. In fact, much depends on inspiration, personal qualities, knack, savvy, on the part of the volunteers or junior staff (or whoever) who actually work with the youth-groups.

This is true, even for Scoutmasters (etc.) who get detailed guidance from their parent organization. It is even more true in cases such as churches' young people's programs, where there is no national model to borrow from. In order to "launch" a group--plan the program, establish a structure of incentives and goals, fix the organization of the group (youth-offices, committees, meetings-procedures), work out one's own educative purposes; and then to have it all gather momentum, engage the members' interest, to see group spirit develop--this is no mean achievement.

In disastrous youth group meetings I have attended--and others I have heard about--the leaders did not seem to know what to do. Here are two examples, in which there appeared to be insufficient plan and purpose.

In one church, the young assistant pastor with his fiance tried to start a program. The kids played floor hockey and other games, and roughhoused. He had trouble keeping order. No one seemed to take it seriously, and the program dissolved before any serious purpose ever emerged.

In another church, the youth started their own group. There was a series of meetings in which they discussed what they would do, how they would organize, what projects they might work on; there was discussion of money-raising schemes, without agreement as to what the money would be used for. No clear image of a program ever took shape; no individual ~~xx xxxx~~ ever emerged as leader; and the group petered out.

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These are extreme examples of stillborn groups--evidently because there was no plan. In other cases, leader-deficiencies which were less obvious and harder to describe seem to be the reason--the missing ingredient --in unsuccessful groups.

When it all works--when the group does become launched, picks up momentum, generates enthusiasm, has direction--then part of the credit must go to personalized input by the local leader (or leaders); and some credit might be given to the parent organization which provided guidance. Fairly full and detailed accounts of youth programs[6] give the impression that many components have to come together, form a whole, in order for it all to work. These include: programming features (engaging the youth's interest, getting them to work at ego-engaging projects); organizational features; and personal attributes of the leader or leaders. (Perhaps some members confide in the leader; they respect him; he has inspirational qualities; or whatever.) This magic formula--when it is arrived at--tends to be unstable. Youth-officers change from year to year; the adult leader may leave too; program-changes are often necessary, to keep up with shifts of interest in a changing membership. Unfortunately, once a group has "found it," it can very easily "lose it" again.

Therefore the formula for success idea can be employed, to explain some of the cases of groups that are in decline.[7] The decline takes the form of a process of unravelling. A necessary component changes, this leads to other changes, and it all begins to come apart. Or--with cases of groups that are transformed, but not necessarily for the worst--a key component (like the leader)changes; this leads to other changes; and the group simply becomes a very different group, with an altered character, a re-arranged "formula for success."

An example is a Scout troop in a New Brunswick village. It lost--not its Scoutmaster--but some senior patrol leaders; and the unravelling began.

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Ideally, a Boy Scout troop is top-heavy with "leadership" and adult support. Not only is there a host institution (church or school) to hold meetings in; and a board to raise money and pressure more parents to volunteer; but also several other adults, assistant leaders, to help the Scoutmaster. Then there are high-school-age senior patrol leaders, who often, in practice, do a great deal of the leading; and under them the patrol leaders (aged thirteen and fourteen usually) and assistant patrol leaders (usually aged twelve and thirteen). Finally there are the other Scouts, aged eleven to fourteen. This entire structure, with all its age-tiers, is best. Some troops of course have to struggle along with less. Girl Scout and Girl Guide (and most other) groups have much less than this in the way of leaders. But this age-tiered structure is part of the Boy Scouts' formula. When it is very much reduced, a troop is in trouble. Then the Scoutmaster is not getting enough help. An exception might be a very small troop, in which the Scoutmaster can get along with less help. But he still needs someone at every age-level. With no high-school-aged helpers, he is at a serious disadvantage.

With the New Brunswick troop: the unravelling seems to have begun with the departure of senior patrol leaders. Their high school had put on a later school bus, so that it became easier for them to stay for after-school activities; so there was now more competition for the senior leaders' time. A number of boys graduated from high school, left, got married, were not replaced. The work load for remaining leaders increased; several more quit.

Membership fell off, for reasons that are not clear. (School-busing, making for more competition for the younger boys' time? Simply fewer boys of the right age in this rural area? A troop already in decline becoming less appealing, so that it lost members?)

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The next observation of this troop occurred when it was well into its floundering phase. In its desperation, it had lowered the required aged. Six-year-olds could join the troop! Patrol leaders and APLs could be eleven or ten. The Scoutmaster had very little help from people high-school-aged or older. He had some trouble keeping order in meetings. And the programmed activities had gone into decline. The little boys could not cope well on camping trips, so these (reportedly) were less successful. Camping and other outings were less frequent. (Excursions, requiring extra effort to prepare, put a load on the leadership. A hard-pressed leader would be inclined to cut these back.) The under-aged patrol leaders were not up to the demands of leading projects, taking responsibility for their patrols on camping trips, or even keeping order. With a less eventful program, the troop had trouble keeping boys interested. Over-burdened ~~xxxxx~~ leaders ~~(xxxx)~~ were more inclined to quit. The troop was into a spiral of decline.

In retrospect: lowering the age-limits was the crucial mistake. If the troop had simply grown smaller, and changed its organization accordingly, perhaps it could have reached a new equilibrium as a different kind of Scout troop. This seems clear now. Of course one cannot know what the pressures were, on the leadership, at the time of the decision. Also, different versions of "what happened" are possible. Probably, this post mortem falls short of being fair and adequate; as do other reconstructions of what went into groups' declines. Likewise, to adequately explain why a group was a success--what all the components were--is probably too much to hope for. At any rate, one can think of a formula for success--various components coming together in a happy combination--to explain a group that "clicks." And its subsequent downfall can be explained in terms of this formula becoming disrupted.

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Organizations' Support.

When one looks beyond the local groups to the national (and international, and regional) organizations--some of these have also gone into decline. I have found no written histories that document this for recent times.[8] All I have are word-of-mouth accounts; but these tell of dramatic changes in brief periods of time. In mainland Nova Scotia, at the beginning of the 1970s, Hi-Y seems to have been the most popular service group for young people. By the mid-70s it had completely disappeared. (It continues in the United States; and in isolated Canadian Ys there are sporadic attempts to revive it.) In the early '70s, an important service group in Cape Breton was Young Christian Students. It, too, went into drastic decline, and shifted away from its earlier service emphasis. In the mid-'70s, Young Judaea was a magnificent youth program in Nova Scotia synagogues. By 1980 it was all but wiped out. The organizations that sponsored these programs of course continue--Jewish, Catholic, YMCA; and the individual churches and Ys are still there. To some extent, other programs have supplanted these older ones.

The churches, who seem especially experimental-minded, are continually phasing in new youth programs and program-features; phasing out old ones. Human relations discussion groups, SERENDIPITY exercises, Festivals of Faith, adventure education, work camps, mission trips--fashions change. Other organizations such as Scouts and Guides tinker with their programs, revise their handbooks, adjust age-groupings downward (in the case of Boy Scouts and Girl Guides), create new age-groups (such as Beavers and Venturers). This tinkering tends to cause dislocations and gives rise to complaints from local troops. One hopes it is worth the trouble. I assume that what is involved here is: the organizations are trying to keep up with changing times; adjusting national-level formats for programs, so that they will not lose out to other groups, in the competition for members and support. Also, the precipitous decline of Hi-Y, Young Judaea and Young Christian Students: I assume this too is a matter of changing

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times. Especially Hi-Y and YCS, which were most strongly service-oriented: evidently their idealistic appeal fit the spirit of 1970, but not the mood of the later '70s.

Therefore, the changes--and rise and fall--of national programs, must have something to do with adjusting the "formulae for success." Conditions change, the organizations are competing with each other, and they grope for the right formulae to keep abreast.

Beyond this, there is competition for support--especially money; also adult volunteers' time. The national organizations, along with smaller regional and local organizations--not only youth groups, but also charitable organizations, other kinds of voluntary organizations, universities and hospitals and individual churches--must divide among themselves a finite amount of money. Some of it comes from government grants; some from the United Fund; some from the groups' own money-raising projects; and a small amount from user fees. Since we now are in a period of financial hard times, the competition has become rather grim; programs are being cut back and under-funded. Since, evidently, the previous two decades saw a proliferation of voluntary organizations (both youth groups and otherwise), we are now in a period of "shakedown." Voluntary organizations are being "weeded out." Similarly, the groups will have to discontinue certain of their programs.

As to what makes for survival in a situation such as this: since the ultimate need is for money and volunteers, grantsmanship and public relations of course become very important. I have been told that the largest organizations, such as YMCA and Red Cross, campaign for funding from the great corporations; and they have sophisticated national offices to do that. Beyond this, running successful programs probably helps in getting support. To have a growing membership, to be able to generate enthusiasm--this must help, in getting money and volunteers. Similarly, shrewd and thrifty management, realistic planning, must become more important for survival during hard times--in the voluntary sector, as it is in businesses.

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I feel I know little about this subject--just a bit of hearsay--and I regret this; since it is so important. If money is in short supply, volunteer-time evidently is too.[9] This is very serious also, of course, since the organizations rely so heavily on adult volunteers.

Conclusion.

This concludes the rundown of explanations for failures (and successes) of youth groups. The review has been organized around themes or general points--commitment; programming; what happens when the leader leaves; getting and keeping financial support; struggling to retain a formula for success. This has certainly not been a fine-grained analysis, such as some of my students have given me in their write-ups of youth groups they have known. Certain of these topics could have been done in much greater detail. In the manner of Ed Wynne's good-school checklist, various of my students could produce rather long lists of their own. A good-camp checklist. A good-coach checklist. A good Brown Owl.

To my knowledge there has been no prior social-science literature on this subject; only guidebooks (how to plan a program or lead a group of a particular type; how to lead a discussion group; guides to coaching, etc.), and the handbooks produced by the Y, Scouts, and so on, in which they offer their national-program formats as models for local groups. This and other problems, having to do with youth-work, is deserving of our attention I think. The youth-work field is an impressive development--a burgeoning social movement--in modern society.

NOTES.

1. The fieldwork consisted of visiting meetings and events, talking to staff and to parents, in Halifax and some nearby small towns; in Prince Edward Island; and (in the United States) in Boston, Evansville, Indiana and Tallahassee, Florida. Also, about two hundred of my students at Dalhousie have either talked to me about their past experiences in youth groups, or written papers on the subject, or both.

2. The coverage was aimed at emcompassing the entire youth-work field, with the exception of government programs designed to deal with youth problems; and, of course, with the exception of what goes on in the classroom. This has been written up in a long manuscript, Activities afor Teenagers. An earlier book on the subject is Organizations for Children and Youth, by Robert Hanson and Reynold Carlson. (Prentice-Hall 1972.)

3. I have been able to find no documentation for this: that the mortality rate of youth programs is high; and that leaders tend to quit and move on. This is simply the story that has been so frequently told to me, by my informants; and, in fieldwork check-backs, a program has so often changed or discontinued, the leader so frequently departed.

Despite this, I think that youth-work is a healthy field. Change, turnovers, and new departures, are simply part of its nature. Again in the absence of historical documentation: it seems that the field has grown enormously in the past several decades. Some of the organizations have lost membership. (T.J. LaBelle, "An introduction to the nonformal education of children and youth," Comparative Education Review, 1981. Thanks to Judith Kleinfeld for this reference.) But I think this is because there are so many more youth-programs, competing for children's time, than there were fifteen or twenty years ago. Youth of today have an enormous array of activities and groups, to choose from. But it is not simply that they have more to do. Some of the clubs and groups and programs have

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real educational potential: responsibility-training, for people who hold offices and arrange events; personal growth perhaps, for teenagers who do volunteer work and take advantage of travel programs; and so on. In other words, not only is the variety greater; I think real substance has increased. (Student council officers, for example, now preside over budgets of thousands of dollars. I do not think this was common several decades ago.)

I believe the major trend is one of growth, innovation, proliferation of youth-offerings; but there are, it is true, a number of counter-trends. The financial hard times have evidently taken their toll on the organizations. Also I have heard complaints to the effect that adult volunteers--who are the actual youth-workers and group-leaders in so many of these programs--are now less willing to step forward, and less willing to commit themselves to long terms of service. This includes teachers, in some localities, who now resist pressure to help with extracurricular activities.

If growth of the field could be represented in a graph, I think it would show an enormous surge, ending in a minor downturn.

4. Paul Gaump, "Adolescence and the significance of function." Character, Vol.3, Number 1, November 1981, pp.1-4.

5. Howard Becker, "Notes on the concept of commitment."American Journal of Sociology, Vol.66, July 1960, pp.32-40.

6. In Activities for Teenagers, I attempt to do this for Allied Youth on Prince Edward Island (in chapter six), based mainly on input from my former student Kevin Edgecombe, who also wrote a Masters Thesis on the subject. ("A Case Study of the Allied Youth Organization on Prince Edward Island." Dalhousie University, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, 1979.)

7. Imagining a complicated and unstable "formula" which, once found, can easily be lost again, may be more apt for voluntary groups with youth-officers, such as Scouts, 4-H, high school clubs, and the like. Perhaps the metaphor is less appropriate with sports teams (under the tight control of their coaches),

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school bands and orchestras, and possibly with summer camps and recreation programs.

8. Joseph Kett's Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present (New York: Basic Books, 1977) has been invaluable as a history of youth-work movements; and it chronicles the origins of various youth organizations; but it does not give this kind of detail for recent times.

9. Volunteering in general has declined. (Benjamin DeMott, "The day the volunteers didn't." Psychology Today, March 1978, pp. 23-24, 131-132.) For the youth-work field, my only evidence is word-of-mouth -- complaints by youth-organization staff.

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